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SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
REMARKS AT ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION WITH NEWS SERVICES REPORTERS
PENTAGON
DECEMBER 7, 1994

Secretary Perry: ...both with regard to the situation in Bosnia and the way NATO relates to that, and to the expansion plans of NATO which were discussed in some length at the Foreign Minister's NATO meeting last week.

I have had telephonic discussions with several of my Minister of Defense counterparts in NATO, and I will have a bilateral meeting with the French Minister of Defense on Monday, with the British Minister of Defense on Tuesday, and then with all of the relevant NATO Ministers of Defense at the Wednesday NATO Defense Ministers meeting.

Following the Defense Minister's meeting on Wednesday, there will be a meeting in Brussels of the so-called Nuclear Planning Group Thursday morning. Then, Thursday afternoon, I will fly to Moscow, and be meeting in Moscow as part of the Gore/Chernomyrden Commission, which is set up... I am the chairman of the committee of that commission, which is designed to promote demilitarization within Russia, and particular supporting some of the defense conversion programs that are underway in Russia today.

I also expect to have bilateral meetings while there at the Ministry of Defense on Friday afternoon, and then I'll return home Friday evening. I plan to go to St. Louis, Saturday, for the Battle of the Bulge 50th Anniversary Ceremony. So, next week is going to be a busy and an interesting week.

I want to also reflect that, as you know, I was in Haiti on Thanksgiving Day, and was very impressed with the excellent work that our troops are doing there.

2500

While there, I announced that we are going to draw those forces down to 6,000 by the 15th of December, and we are on that schedule, and that we will rotate out the forces that are there in January. The units that are in the 10th Mountain Infantry Division from Fort Drum will rotate back to Fort Drum, and they will be replaced by a comparable unit from the 25th Infantry Division, which is now based at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

John Deutch was down in Haiti, yesterday. He reported to me this morning - continues to report the same observation I had, that the work being done there in establishing a secure and stable environment in Haiti continues quite satisfactorily. Our Army forces there are maintaining a good level of security. At the same time, the Army and Justice -- people from the Justice Department are training a Haitian police force, which is more and more beginning to take over the duties in Haiti.

Those summarize the opening comments, and I'm ready to take questions.

Q: There seems to be some pressure from incoming Republicans in Congress to speed up the U.S. withdrawal in Haiti. Do you see a potential for a turnover or withdrawal of U.S. forces in January or February?

A: No, I do not think the security situation will be prepared for a turnover at that point, yet. We are training. We have a very definite schedule for training the Haitian police force, and that's going to take us several months, into next year, to have that at a sufficient level, sufficient material, that I think we can take the forces out of there.

Q: There are also complaints from that area that the operation is costing too much. Would you take some of that criticism, or reject it?

A: I think it has been and will continue to be a very good investment in terms of our real security. One of the savings is this is the reductions we've already made in terms of refugees that we were housing at Guantanamo. I would hope that we could get them completely repatriated in the not too distant future, so, there will be a cost avoidance as well as a cost, here, in terms of the cost of maintaining the refugees.

Q: When do you think an election can be done, and are you pushing for that?

A: I can only report to you what I hear from my political counterparts on that, that they are looking for a parliamentary election in the first quarter of next year. I can't be more precise than that. The presidential elections will be late in the year, I believe December is the month that they're planning those.

You make a very important point, though, because I consider that to be a real milestone of the restoration of democracy in Haiti -- to have those parliamentary elections and have a new Parliament installed.

Q: Mr. Secretary, on Bosnia, [inaudible] today. We all know that the French have asked for detailed plans by NATO and the UN on withdrawing the troops. Does that mean deeper war, worse war in Bosnia if these troops are pulled out, but that NATO [could be] forced into this decision? You've told us that plans are underway, detailed plans are underway.

Can you give us any idea on a worst case scenario on how many troops might be required, both NATO and U.S. troops? Any kind of ball park figure?

A: I preface it by saying that along with the [inaudible], I'm hoping that those forces do not have to be pulled out. They're performing [a] very valuable function. Nevertheless, it is prudent to do contingency planning on that. That planning is going on in NATO. We are participating in that planning. I would expect that we will have a chance next week at the Minister's meeting to -- we will have an opportunity to review the plans, and I expect that they will be reasonably detailed plans that we will be reviewing. So, I can give you a much better judgment after that meeting as to the maturity of those plans, that they are proceeding with a seriousness of purpose. I would expect to see detailed and carefully laid out plans presented to the Minister at the meeting next week.

Q: How many U.S. troops do you think might have to take part? How many have been put on alert, how many have been told they might take part? And, how would these troops be withdrawn from Bosnia?

A: Again, we haven't been requested for any troops yet, as you know, and I have not seen that plan yet. So, I can talk in quantities, in terms of numbers, much better at the end of next week than I can now.

But, if NATO is asked to go in there, we will certainly want to participate as a leading member of NATO. As we review the plans, we will come to our own best judgment on the best way of participating and will make a concrete proposal at that time.

I think we're not far away from coming to those judgments.

Q: You said you're going to meet with the French Defense Minister on Monday here?

A: Monday here, yes.

Q: In meeting with the two Ministers, the British and the French Defense Ministers, are you worried that NATO might be coming apart at the seams, or certainly might be weakened, their credibility in the world might be weakened because of inability to stop...

A: I continue to believe that NATO is the most valuable security institution in the world today and, therefore, it's very important that we take efforts to maintain its strength, to maintain its cohesion. My meetings with my Defense Minister counterparts, Secretary Christopher's meetings with his Foreign Minister counterparts, are directed, specifically, to that purpose, for the U.S. to provide what leadership it can provide in terms of maintaining that cohesion.

My forecast, to answer your question more directly, is that "yes," we will hold NATO together as a strong, viable institution. The reason we will is because not only do we believe that's an important gesture, but that's certainly been the same view expressed by all of my NATO counterparts. I talked this morning with Minister Leotard from France. We are of the common view of the importance of the United States and France standing together with the other NATO nations in this crisis.

Q: Are there any chances of a peace agreement coming before the Congress would take a vote on breaking the embargo?

A: Yes, I think there are chances. The Contact Group continues to meet, continues to work. I'm not in a position to make any forecast for you as to whether and when a peace plan will be reached, but we have not given up, the Contact Group has not given up. The reason we haven't given up is because the alternative is very unattractive. The alternative, as Minister Juppe has said, if they cannot get to a peace plan, they will consider pulling UNPROFOR out of there. I agree with the Minister that that will lead to a widening of the war and an intensification of the war -- a very undesirable development. The reason that UNPROFOR itself has played a very important role in limiting the scope and intensity of the war. To pull it out of there, that benefit will be lost. So, all of us are doing what we can to try to keep it in there, but I do understand that if progress on the peace plan cannot be made in the months ahead, I understand that both the British and the French are considering withdrawing their forces.

Q: What kind of time frame are they working on? Six months, eight months? How long can they realistically stay in there?

A: I will, again, be in a better position to give you their judgment on that and talk with them in detail next week. I do have Foreign Minister [Kurt's] statement when he was talking about weeks. He did not say how many weeks. But, as opposed to a year or as opposed to many, many months.

Q: The Bosnian Serb leader said today that he might be willing -- he indicated he was willing to return to the peace table, but he said that was on grounds that he understood that the contact group was ready to change the map under the peace plan, and possibly the whole constitution issue before the Serbs accepted it, before the Bosnian Serbs.

A: I don't think I want to comment on his comment on the Contact Group's comment on what the plans are. That's getting too far removed. He's made some speculation about what the Contact Group is saying. I'm not sure he has the message properly from them.

Q: You said that the Contact Group is not ready to change the peace plan, not prepared to change the peace plan or the map.

A: The Contact Group is trying to bring the combatant parties together. What they may be willing to do to reach a peace agreement is really up to them to decide, not up to the Contact Group. It's role is the role of a facilitator, bringing these parties together and trying to urge them into a settlement peace plan. But those kind of decisions, the maps and the issues of the federation are decisions to be made by the parties to the peace plan. I emphasize again, the contact group is only the facilitator, not a "decider" on what the peace plan will be.

Q: Mr. Secretary, have we reached a point beyond which the Bosnian [defenders] have become too weak to defend themselves even if supplied with arms, and if so, when did we reach that point?

A: I'll say again, John, what my assessment of the military situation there, a one word description of it is a stalemate. I think the Bosnian government forces have been out-manned and out-gunned in the Bihac area, but they're quite strong in central Bosnia. In fact they're still making some advances in central Bosnia. So I think that's an erroneous conclusion to come to from the data that I've seen now.

A better conclusion is that neither side can expect to gain any substantial military value or substantial change in the map by their military actions alone. To the extent they come to believe that, which is what I believe, then they should be impelled to try to come to some sort of agreement, a diplomatic agreement.

Q: Do you think all this talk about heavier bombing campaigns, is this helpful? What do you think about Senator Dole's proposals for lifting and striking?

A: First of all, I have never been in favor of unilateral lift and strike because it will drive the UNPROFOR forces out of there, without question. I've already said that I thought UNPROFOR was performing a very useful function in limiting the intensity and the violence of the war. So, that's why I don't favor the

unilateral lifting and strike. If, on the other hand, UNPROFOR does pull out of there for other reasons, for whatever reasons UNPROFOR pulls out, then that certainly opens up more flexibility and pressure could be put on -- both military and diplomatic pressure. But, I am not in favor of unilateral lift and strike because it would drive the UNPROFOR out. to the extent it's possible to keep them in there, I think we should try to do that.

Q: If UNPROFOR decided tomorrow to pull out because they're just tired or whatever, that opens, then -- NATO -- the possibility of a wider NATO air campaign?

A: It's a different set of options open at that time. My reason for being opposed to unilateral lift and strike then go away at that stage. Then we can consider that issue on the merits. Depending on what the situation on the ground was at that time, depending on where we were in diplomatic negotiations, then we could consider it. I wouldn't want to advocate or not advocate, because I can't quite forecast what's going to happen with UNPROFOR pulling out of there. That can inject a very different situation, and it's just too hard to imagine the circumstances at that time, to say what you would be willing to do or not willing to do in terms of actions then.

Q: What do you think about the German participation [inaudible] Deny Flight? Germany being asked by NATO to participate in...

A: I would welcome German participation in Deny Flight.

Q: Could we talk a little bit about some domestic issues? In particular, where is the Department on the decisions involving the Deutch memo? Could you disclose the particulars of your decisions on that? We'd be glad to have that. [Laughter] Or, can you give us a sense of your direction. Now that you've got this... What is important in modernization? What are your priorities?

A: Let me say, first of all, in terms of the process that we're going through, we had done most of the work in putting the FY96 budget and the out-year budget together a few weeks ago. There were several unimportant, very important unanswered questions. We could not answer those questions until we knew what top line we were going to be working with. And, in particular, whether we would be able to do our initiatives in readiness and initiatives in quality of life, and how deeply we might have to cut modernization. Depending on what the top line was.

So, we asked the President to make an early decision on that. By early, I mean before the rest of the budget decisions had been made, which he agreed to do, and that led to the announcement last week.

With that decision by the President, we're now in a position to make final, including the decisions on modernization programs. We're going through that process this very week, intensely. As you know, where the Office of the Secretary of Defense, in this case it's being managed by Deputy Secretary Deutch, works with each of the services to get their proposals. Now that we have a top line, a final adjustment, final proposals coming in, I would expect within a week we will have a final determination made on these programs. We will make a final review of those programs with the White House, the President, and then with his blessing we'll be in a position to ascribe to those positions.

But, the fundamental decision was made by the President last week. That means that the quality-of-life initiatives are funded, the one that I announced a few weeks ago. We have a substantial "plus-up" to readiness programs, which is now in the FY96 and beyond budget. We're working on the details of just how that's going to be split among the services now. It also means that in terms of the modernization program, the cuts will not need to be as deep as the ones we imagined we might have to make at the time that Deutch sent that memo out.

So, there's good news on the modernization front, as well as the readiness and the quality of life initiatives.

Q: I guess what I'm asking is how much good news? Are things like the Comanche going to be able to survive intact, or do you believe that there will be more funding for the F-22 than you might have had before? Can you give us a little sense in your...

A: I'm sorry, I cannot give you the fine grain you're looking for right now. I can only tell you that the boundary conditions we're working under, or the constraints we are working under are not as difficult now, and therefore, there will be fewer programs cut and the ones that are cut will not be cut as deeply.

Q: The Republicans are hot on the B-2 and a resurgence of the Star Wars program. The 4th of November, I believe, you said that you did not believe there was going to be a restart of the B-2 line. Is that even a possibility now in your mind? Has that changed?

A: Let me answer that question, very carefully. We have been requested by the Congress and are doing a bomber study. That has a few months to go yet. The purpose of the bomber study was looking at tradeoffs between using the strategic bombers for conventional missions and the standard attack bombers for conventional missions. It was based on the theory that we may be able to perform some functions that are typically done by tactical aircraft, that those might be done better by strategic aircraft like the B-2. That's a reasonable proposition, and we were asked to study that and we are studying it. We'll have an answer to that in a

few months. At any budget level there might be some tradeoffs made between having the B-2s perform some of those missions, and therefore, there might be an argument for building more B-2s than we had originally planned to build.

But, that's not tied, specifically, to this budget debate that's going on now. That would be a possibility even at lower budget levels because it envisions what we call a "zero-sum" analysis. The study is with the zero sum. At a given level of funding, do we get better defense by spending less money on tactical aircraft and more money on strategic aircraft?

Q: You don't sound quite as adamantly opposed to more B-2s as you seemed to have been earlier.

A: What I've been saying about B-2s right along is there's no money in the budget to do this. This study does not presume more money, it assumes trading off some program already in the budget in favor of B-2s. That's what's being studied right now. As I said, the answer to that is a couple of months off and I wouldn't want to forecast that. But, the study is not looking at the possibility of putting more money in the budget in order to do the B-2 program.

Q: Isn't the Air Force's large tactical aircraft program now the F-22? Wouldn't you be trading off F-22 moneys for more B-2s?

A: You could trade off F-22s, you could trade-off F-18s.

Q: The Navy would scream.

A: Of course.

I want to emphasize, this is a study, and it's a study looking at exploring the theory that you could make those kinds of tradeoffs. I haven't seen it, the study hasn't been done yet, and I don't know what the outcome is. I wouldn't want to forecast an outcome at this time. But, I can tell you the study is being done seriously and conscientiously.

Q: But, the programs you will come to a decision on in the coming week -- we expect in the coming week -- and that the President will [inaudible] would be unlikely to include more B-2s in that particular study.

A: That is correct.

Q: But, you know the political reality surrounding the B-2, now is -- if this study comes out and says this is any kind of a good idea -- the Hill is going to be screaming for you to make these tradeoffs.

A: That's right.

Q: You're stuck, one way or the other, unless it comes out and says, "This is a stupid idea."

A: Even if you don't like an answer to a carefully done study, you really ought to do the study and come to the most honest, the most objective answer you can come to and, then, present it honestly. I'm prepared to accept the consequences of an honest answer with a conscientious study. I'm not prepared to forecast that answer, though, at this time.

Q: If the study does say, "This is smart," that still doesn't mean that you have to do it. You can say, "Well, another study..." It's not binding on you to accept that per se. It's a conclusion, but you can still say, "I disagree with this, or I don't think this would be the best way for the future..."

A: That's right. I might say that this study did a very good job in looking at these factors, but it overlooked some other factors, which I'm not imposing. A generic answer, you can make any study that's being proposed, not just this particular one. But, I will assure you, I will look very seriously and conscientiously at the study when it's done. We're not taking it lightly.

Q: What do you think of some of the proposals for perhaps boosting funding for ballistic missile defenses? Are there areas there where you think more money could be put to good use? What do you think of some of those...

A: We will have, in the budget we submit to the Congress, what I would call a "robust" program in theater missile defense, leading towards deployment with an aggressive schedule. I'm prepared to defend the budget to Congress on that basis. What we will not have in the program is a robust program leading to deployment of a continental missile defense system. I think that's where the debate is going to be in the progress. We have an R&D program in that area, and it's an area that could be expanded and turned into a program slated for deployment. It's my judgment that this is not the appropriate time to be making a decision on a system -- a deployed system in the United States for continental defense.

Q: So you're saying you don't want to undo the ABM Treaty?

A: Leaving the ABM Treaty aside even, it's a matter of looking at what are the threats to the United States, and what are the ways of defending it. I don't see that as a near term threat. I see it, very possibly, as a long term threat. Therefore, we have to continue the R&D so that we are positioned -- so we can move rather quickly to a deployed system if we see that threat looming in the future.

I think, any such threat to the United States will be telegraphed well enough in advance that, if we keep a vigorous R&D program, we'd be able to move quickly to an appropriate defense.

I am not negative about ballistic missile defense, at all. As I say, we have a robust program in the theater where we see the threat right now, and I'm prepared to go to a continental defense -- continental United States -- as soon as I see the threat materializing.

Q: The Republicans are particularly harping on transferring money from TRP, defense conversion environmental funding, to what they call military readiness and modernization. How long do you think you're going to have to fight to keep those programs? Do you consider those seriously endangered now?

A: Two related points on it. First is, the Technology Reinvestment program is a very good investment for the country. We are getting very good defense R&D out of that program. And, coincidentally, its research and development is also useful in the commercial field, that is, it helps the economy of the country, as well. But, every one of those Technology Reinvestment programs has to pass a test of being not only relevant to defense, but highly important to defense. It's no coincidence that the technologies which are being supported in that program -- the light gun, advanced semiconductors, advanced computer technologies -- are technologies which are both of primary importance to advancing defense, and to making it competitive economically.

So, I strongly support those programs, and we will have a strong Technology Reinvestment program in the budget, in the Congress, and I am not only prepared to defend that program to Congress, I look forward to defending that program. I think it's a program which... I have a lot of confidence that it's a good investment for taxpayers, and for security.

The other half of the issue is the issue of readiness. The budget we submit to the Congress, I am not only prepared, but happy to defend it from the point of view of what it does for readiness. Particularly, now that the President has made a decision that he's "plussing" up the budget. Most of those resources are directed to readiness and quality of life. I think we will be in good shape in the programs relative to readiness.

I want to distinguish in readiness between present readiness and future readiness. Present readiness is very good, already, with the exception of the division -- which we've already discussed with you -- which missed a training cycle because we didn't get our supplemental soon enough, at the end of the last fiscal year. That supplement has now been granted, that training is now scheduled, and those divisions will be back to full readiness in the matter of a month or two.

I repeat, again, those divisions were not divisions on alert, or first-deployment divisions. Those were reinforcement divisions and were not in

particular danger by doing that. But, I still want to get them up to full readiness, and they will be up to readiness early next year.

So, the budget will accommodate maintaining the present readiness of the forces. The issue that's always been in my mind is future readiness. The problem of letting the facilities deteriorate, or barracks deteriorate, or not maintaining enough spare parts and depots... It's allowing an erosion which, over two or three or four years, could affect readiness. So, it's a future readiness issue. That's what these readiness initiatives were directed to.

We already had enough money in the budget for maintaining present readiness. My concern was that we did not have enough for maintaining future readiness, and that's what the readiness initiatives were.

They're also addressed to improving quality of life. I believe that a very important connection [exists] between readiness, three or four years from now, and being able to treat soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines properly, today. That's why we have this quality of life initiative in there.

Everything in the plus-up of the budget is directed to future readiness, not present. We had enough in for the present.

I neglected to mention that, at the same time the President announced the \$25 million plus-up to the '96 and future year defense program, he announced he was going to go for a supplemental early in the year. That supplemental is necessary to maintain present readiness. That's the present readiness issue. Because that's going to replenish the funds taken out of O&M for our contingency operations in the first two quarters of the year. If we don't get those funds replenished, then we will have to start missing training cycles again, and that will affect training readiness.

So, that supplemental, not only getting the supplemental, but getting it in the first quarter of the year, is important to maintaining present readiness.

The FY96 and the FYDP programs, those initiatives are intended to point us to future readiness. Keeping future readiness from [inaudible]

Q: Can you get any better on a concrete figure than \$2 billion plus?

A: On the supplemental?

Q: Yes.

A: Yes we do. I don't have it in my head, but I can get that for you. We can get that for you, shortly.

Q: Can you then address one of the criticisms of the President's initiative that most of the money is in the year 2000 and beyond?

A: That's not right. There is almost \$5 billion in FY95 and FY96 between the supplemental and the plus-up in the '96 budget. That's a big [windfall] that deals with near-term readiness problems and it starts to deal with future readiness problems. The big plus-up at the end of it, the last two years of it, is not directed to readiness problems, it's directed to getting modernization back in gear again.

Q: Why wait until the end to work on modernization? Is it simply a matter of finding the money?

A: It's a matter of two things. One of them is substantive and logical; and that is that when the forces are drawing down we had a reduced requirement for building hardware to replace [inaudible]. Take the M1 tank. We have more than enough M1 tanks in the force today. Therefore, there was no requirement to build M1 tanks while our forces were coming down. By the end of the decade, that's going to change.

While we aren't opposed to doing an M1 tank, I was interested to note that one of the proposals which was dropped in the program is an upgrade program for the M1. That was to upgrade it to the A2, I guess, version. The purpose there was two-fold. First of all, the M1-A2 tank is a better tank, and all of our units want to get that improved tank instead of having the older generation.

But secondly, with that program we maintain the industrial base for making tanks. So when we want to start doing tanks again at the turn of the century, that industrial base will be in place. That's the basis on which it's been criticized. It's been criticized because it's an industrial base program. The same basis on which the Sea Wolf program was criticized.

Q: [Inaudible] to NATO [inaudible]... against [inaudible] saying this would lead to a cold peace. Do you think there is a voice to go to a cold peace after a cold war?

A: I don't think that's either necessary or desirable. It's certainly not a necessary consequence of the kind of NATO expansion plans which were proposed by Secretary Christopher at the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting. That's a very gradual plan, and a plan for exploring the expansion of NATO over the period of the years ahead.

In parallel with whatever we're doing, whatever the NATO expansion is, in parallel with that, NATO is developing its own relationship with Russia. The United States is developing very important bilateral relationships with Russia. We're all working together to expand the significance of the CSCE as a security institution. These actions which are happening in parallel with NATO expansion pay particular attention to Russia's very legitimate interest as being a member of the European security community.

Russia should not feel any threat by any plans being considered for the expansion of NATO. They are not directed against Russia, and they are in no way a threat to Russia on the one hand; on the other hand, many actions go in parallel, which tends to bring Russia in to the European security community.

Q: One point of clarification. You said you will have in the upcoming budget a robust program for theater missile defense. Does that mean that the funding will be continued as in past years, or will you be increasing it somewhat?

A: What I meant by that, Suzanne, I wasn't trying to be quantitative. What I meant by it is that there will be a program geared towards an early deployment. "Robust," in this case, meaning not just R&D, it has a deployed system in it. Secondly, that there are several parallel programs, actually. A sea-based program and a ground-based program. So, it's not a single system we're proceeding on, but several.

Q: Early, [inaudible] in what sense? What are you looking at in terms of time?

A: I don't have the schedule in my head right now, but I can get that for you.

Q: I've got a question on the Middle East, Jordan, if I may. Border patrol equipment aside, why does Jordan need advanced, top of the line U.S. defensive weapons, particularly in light of the peace treaty with Israel?

A: The question, first of all, it's a decision of the Jordanian government. But, to the extent that [the] U.S. participates in that, we make our own judgments on it as well. I think that's the thrust of your question.

But, Jordan believes that they live in a troubled neighborhood. I wouldn't want to really argue with him on that judgment. They've got a history of trouble all around Jordan. Even if there was a complete and total friendship between Jordan and Israel, there are other countries in the region which compose a military threat to Jordan. I think that's a value judgment on their part, and we will work to cooperate with the Jordanian government in helping them with reasonable moves to improve their defense capability.

Q: Can you give us some sense of how you see working with the Republicans in Congress? What's your sense of that? With some of the tumultuous language that's been thrown out in recent days?

A: The Comptroller is preparing an information paper on the supplemental and they're checking to see how much they can release right now. We'll try to get this to you after this discussion.

On the political aspect of it, Suzanne, I am sincerely hoping that we will be able to work in a bipartisan way for the good of the country on putting our defense program together. I have some reason to be optimistic on that, in that the four committees with which we work most closely in the Defense Department do have a tradition of dealing with problems on a bipartisan basis. This department, and myself in particular, have worked with both the Democratic and Republican chairman and ranking members traditionally, since I've been in this...

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...committees with the chairman and the ranking minority. So there is a good tradition, both of those committee working bipartisan themselves, and with this Department working in a bipartisan way. So I have every hope that we'll be able to develop an effective bipartisan working relationship with the Congress. It will be a challenge for them and for us.

Thank you all.

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Perry says no to GOP call for Star Wars

He also rejected
a push for a quick
pullout from Haiti.

By Susanne M. Schafer
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary William J. Perry rejected Republican calls for the revival of a "Star Wars" missile-defense system yesterday, saying he prefers to put money into battlefield anti-missile defenses.

In an interview with news service reporters, Perry also turned aside top GOP lawmakers' calls for a pullout from Haiti as soon as possible and criticism that the effort was costing U.S. taxpayers too much.

Perry said his 1996 budget, to be

made public early next year, would include a "robust program" for sea-based and ground-based anti-missile defenses.

"What we will not have in the program is a robust program leading to deployment of a continental missile defense system, and that's where I think the debate is going to be in the Congress," Perry said.

He said there was no current threat to the United States that would justify building such a huge missile-defense system. The Pentagon is doing enough research to build such a system in time to meet the threat, should one materialize, he added.

On Haiti, Perry said the U.S. involvement "has been and continues to be a very good investment" because it had ended the flow of refugees to the United States' southern shores and would pave the way to shutting down the refugee center at Guantanamo Bay on Cuba.

However, training a new Haitian police force will take several months, Perry said, and therefore a handoff from U.S. troops to U.N. peace-keepers will not be possible as early as January or February.

"I don't think the security situation will be prepared for a turnover" at that time, Perry said.

Incoming Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R., Kan.) has called for a quick withdrawal of U.S. forces. Sen. Jesse Helms (R., N.C.), the incoming chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, has made similar statements.

More than 21,000 U.S. troops were sent into Haiti to help restore President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to office, and Perry pointed out that the number would be down to about 6,000 by mid-December.

Perry said he expected that parliamentary elections would be held in Haiti during the first quarter of the year but that presidential elections would not take place until next December. The transfer of responsibility to a U.N. force depends on the timing of elections.

On Bosnia, the secretary said he would review NATO's plans to aid in a potential withdrawal of U.N. peace-keepers at a meeting of alliance defense ministers next week in Brussels, Belgium.

But he declined to disclose the number or type of troops Washington might contribute to such a force, saying only that the nations attempting to work on a peace accord had not given up.

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Pg. 11

Defense chief rejects revival of 'star wars'

Defense Secretary William Perry rejected Republican calls for the revival of a "star wars" missile defense system Wednesday, saying he prefers to put money into battlefield anti-missile defenses. Perry said his upcoming budget would include a "robust program" for both sea-based and ground-based anti-missile defense systems. He said there is no current threat to the United States that would justify building a "star wars"-like defense system. The Pentagon is doing enough research to build that kind of system in time to meet the threat, he said.

In an interview with news service reporters, he also turned aside top GOP lawmakers' calls for a quick pullout from Haiti and criticism the effort is costing too much. The U.S. involvement in Haiti "continues to be a very good investment" because it has ended the flow of refugees to the United States, Perry said. But training a new Haitian police force will push a hand-off from U.S. troops to United Nations peacekeepers to at least February, he said.

The White House has all but ruled out a trip to Haiti by President Clinton to meet with U.S. troops during the holidays, as had been expected. "Nothing is scheduled, and I don't think you should look for any trip coming up in the next few weeks," White House press secretary Dee Dee Myers said.